

Mishlei 04-04**The Wrong Road
(4:14 - 19)****Key Concepts**

Mishlei reminds us that as we travel our road through life, we can easily get side-tracked onto a bad road. Whereas the good road is illuminated by the light of wisdom, the bad road is immersed in spiritual darkness. That darkness causes people to stumble and fall.

Why would anyone get onto a bad road? From the time we get up in the morning we are faced with decisions, large and small. Facing so many decisions is very tiresome and so we get into the habit of not thinking about the implications of each decision. Instead, if the situation is similar to one we faced before, we just make the same choice, hoping that if it worked before it will work again.

So we don't always realize what road we are on unless we stop to think about it. Mishlei suggests that we check to see who else is on that road. If the road is traveled by people lacking morality or integrity, it is the wrong road for us, even though we are confident that we can reach our destination without being affected by the *resha'im* (wicked people) we encounter on our way.

In talking about roads, Mishlei speaks about both a narrow path or lane (*orach*) that leads to a specific destination and a major road or thoroughfare (*derech*) which leads to many places. We need to be careful about all types of road because there are all kinds of decisions to be made in life.

Exploring Mishlei

PART 1. STAY AWAY. Mishlei begins this segment by admonishing us to avoid the road being traveled by *resha'im*. If we find ourselves on such a road we should get off immediately.

(יד) בְּאֶרֶחַ רְשָׁעִים אַל תֵּבֵא וְאֵל תִּתְאָשֶׁר בְּדֶרֶךְ רָעִים: (טו) פְּרָעָהּ, אַל תֵּעָבֵר בּוֹ
שְׂטָה מֵעָלָיו וְעֵבֹר:

(14) Don't go into the path of *resha'im*. Don't take a step on the road of dishonest people. (15) Reject [their practices]. Don't pass by [that way].

Turn away from it.

PART 2. PATTERNS OF BEHAVIOR. He reminds us that the *resha'im* on that road are not just innocent travelers. It is not immediately apparent but they get their satisfaction by establishing patterns of behavior that are spiritually destructive.

(טז) כִּי לֹא יִשְׁנוּ אִם לֹא יִרְעוּ וְנִגְזְלָה שְׁנַתָּם אִם לֹא יִכְשִׁילוּ: (יז) כִּי לֶחֶמוֹ לֶחֶם רָשָׁע
וַיִּין חֲמָסִים יִשְׁתּוּ:

(16) For they can't sleep if they don't practice evil. Their sleep will be robbed if they don't cause [others] to fail. (17) For their bread is the bread of wickedness. They drink the wine of violence.

PART 3. CONTRAST. Mishlei concludes the segment by comparing the road traveled by *tzadikim* to the one traveled by *resha'im*. The first is illuminated with light that keeps getting stronger as the person rises to ever greater levels of spiritual growth. The second is a region of spiritual darkness which drags the unwary traveler further and further down.

(יח) וְאַרְח צְדִיקִים כְּאוֹר נֹגֵה הַזֶּהָב וְאוֹר עַד נֶכּוֹן הַיּוֹם: (יט) דֶּרֶךְ רָשָׁעִים כְּאֶפְלָה
לֹא יָדְעוּ בְּמָה יִכָּשְׁלוּ:

(18) The path of the righteous is like the radiant light [of the sun], growing ever brighter until high noon. (19) The road of the wicked is like the growing darkness. They don't know what is causing them to stumble.

Learning Mishlei

PART 1. STAY AWAY.

(יד) בְּאַרְח רָשָׁעִים אַל תֵּבֵא
וְאַל תֵּאָשֵׁר בְּדֶרֶךְ רָעִים:

Avoid immoral people who have no *yiras Hashem*, even if they seem to behave honorably in human relationships. **Don't go into** even a limited **path of** dealings with these *resha'im* — **בְּאַרְח רָשָׁעִים אַל תֵּבֵא**. You may not get cheated but you will be influenced by the fundamental immorality in their way of thinking.

And when it comes to **dishonest people** — **רָעִים**, who lack integrity, **don't** even **take a step** — **וְאַל תֵּאָשֵׁר** with them, even if it is **on the main road** — **בְּדֶרֶךְ** where there is much traffic and others are present and it seems you are safe. If

they lack basic integrity they are likely to draw you into perverted ways of thinking.

(טו) פָּרַעְהוּ אֶל תַּעֲבָר בּוֹ
שְׂטֵה מֵעַלְיוֹ וְעָבוֹר:

It is not enough to resist emulating the sins of evil people. Be proactive and **reject their** — פָּרַעְהוּ customs and practices so that you will not be affected by their *middos*. **Don't pass by** that way — אֶל תַּעֲבָר בּוֹ even if it is once in a long while for a specific need. But if you are unable to avoid it completely, **turn away from it** — שְׂטֵה מֵעַלְיוֹ quickly **and pass on** — וְעָבוֹר.

PART 2. PATTERNS OF BEHAVIOR.

(טז) כִּי לֹא יִשְׁנוּ אִם לֹא יִרְעוּ
וְנִגְזְלָה שְׁנָתָם אִם לֹא יִכְשִׁילוּ:

For the resha'im can't sleep — כִּי לֹא יִשְׁנוּ **if they don't practice evil** — אִם לֹא יִרְעוּ and so they stay up at night looking for opportunities to initiate trouble. **Their sleep will be robbed** — וְנִגְזְלָה שְׁנָתָם **if they don't** succeed in their efforts to **cause others to fail** — אִם לֹא יִכְשִׁילוּ in *avodas Hashem*.

(יז) כִּי לֶחֶמוֹ לֶחֶם רָשָׁע
וַיֵּין חֲמָסִים יִשְׁתּוּ:

For their bread is the bread of wickedness — כִּי לֶחֶמוֹ לֶחֶם רָשָׁע. They hunger for evil and are unable to sleep if they have not fulfilled their quota of evil for the day. **They drink the wine of violence** — וַיֵּין חֲמָסִים יִשְׁתּוּ and it is only after they have committed wrongdoing that they are soothed and are able to sleep.

PART 3. PATTERNS OF BEHAVIOR.

(יח) וְאֶרְחַ צְדִיקִים כְּאוֹר נֶגְהָ
הוֹלֵךְ וְאוֹר עַד נֶכּוֹן הַיּוֹם:

In contrast to the wicked who feel the need to cause harm, the *tzadikim* are driven by the need to help others and add value to their lives. Thus, the light illuminating **the path of the righteous** — וְאֶרְחַ צְדִיקִים **is like the radiant light** of the sun — כְּאוֹר נֶגְהָ that begins faintly in the morning, **growing ever brighter until high noon** — הוֹלֵךְ וְאוֹר עַד נֶכּוֹן הַיּוֹם.

(יט) דָּרְךְ רְשָׁעִים כְּאֶפְלָה

But the limited visibility on **the road of the wicked is like the growing darkness** — דָּרְךְ רְשָׁעִים כְּאֶפְלָה that gets more intense as the night progresses. They do not see the needs of others and on the contrary, they are like the darkness that causes people to stumble and fall.

לֹא יָדְעוּ בְּמָה יִכָּשְׁלוּ:

But ultimately they themselves are tripped up because they do not see the obstacles in the road ahead. Because they cannot see, **they don't know what is causing them to stumble** — לֹא יָדְעוּ בְּמָה יִכָּשְׁלוּ. They are like dumb animals who respond only to their physical needs and don't have wisdom and don't see the implications of their actions.

Sources

The primary sources used in the interpretation of the verses of this segment are listed below.

ז - הגר"א
 יח - רש"י, אבן עזרא, המאירי, שבט מיהודה
 יט - רש"י, אבן יחיאל, חנוך לנער

יד - רש"י, המאירי, הגר"א
 טו - רש"י, המאירי, אבן יחיאל, מלבי"ם
 טז - רש"י, חנוך לנער

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